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Decision-making by children and young people in the home: the nurture of trust, participation and independence.

Abstract

This article presents the findings of a qualitative research study of children and young people (aged 7-17 years) in Ireland. It seeks to investigate whether, for the children and young people involved, the home is a space where supportive, trusting family relationships can be nurtured; where independence grows with age; and where parents listen, discuss and explain decisions made. It furthermore outlines the views and experiences of parents with regard to children and young people's participation in the home and will focus on relational and spatial aspects of child participation within the home. The results indicate that age and issues of trust and tokenism were significant barriers in young people's participation and decision making at home. Key enablers of children and young people's participation included spaces where discussion can happen at home, good family relationships, being listened to by parents, trust and growing levels of independence with age, seeing decisions as fair and having the rationale for decisions explained to them by parents. Among suggestions for improvements the most important were designated family spaces for discussion, encouragement of active listening by parents, and to promote explanation by adults of their decisions.

5 key words

Home, child-parent relations, participation, decision-making, consumption

Introduction

This article will explore the home as a key space for children to express their views and be involved in decision making. It is in the, "less-observed private world of the family" (Alderson, 2010, p.89) that most children experience their first involvement in decision making. According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the family provides an important participatory model and is the space where a child prepares to exercise the right to be heard in wider society (2009, para. 90). **Through the rights**

articulated in and the principles underpinning it, the UNCRC accepts children as citizens in their own right and recognises their capabilities to determine their own lives. It frames children's lives and well-being in the context of rights and requires children to be recognised as discrete social units with rights of equal value to adults including their parents (Hayes 2002). This study recognizes children and young people as social actors, holders of rights (Tisdall and Punch, 2012) and as agentic beings. The research was also informed by a relational and spatial approach to children's participation which recognises the respective roles and positions of children and adults and establishing interdependence as a basis for children and young people's participation (Wyness, 2012).

According to Alderson (2010), it is the informality of the home that promotes a positive participative environment engendering an ethos of inclusion, choice and respect for children's agency. Studies such as this current one which focus on children's experiences of participation within their home can provide an informative window on children's experiences of agency. While there is a general acceptance of children and young people as social actors the concept of agency is complex and contested. Oswell (2013, p. 50) warns against emphasis on categorical thinking regarding childhood, arguing that the notion of child as agent has all the hallmarks of a social universal. Prout (2011), similarly, contends that there is no need to arbitrarily separate children from adults, as if they were some different species of being. The shift from seeing childhood as an essentialised category towards seeing it as produced within a set of relations necessitates greater attention to childhood networks and co-constructions of intergenerational relations (Prout 2011, 1). Childhood is increasingly recognised, then, as a social and relational phenomenon (Alanen 2001) with children as context-dependent relational beings influenced by the structures and relationships in which they are embedded (Wihstutz 2011; Tisdall and Punch 2012). Central to this approach is a perception of children and young people as individuals, but individuals who live relationally, intergenerationally and in their communities (Mannion, 2007; Leonard, 2016; Authors, 2017). Children are people who have relationships and are embedded in relational processes. The approach recognises the respective roles and positions of children and adults and that interdependence between adults and children is an important basis for participation (Wyness, 2012). Wyness points out that while 'child' and 'adult' are 'distinctive

categories' (ibid, p. 435), each category presupposes the other: there is an important relational dimension to this theory with both adults and children developing and refining their generational identities in and through routine engagement with each other (p. 435).

Percy Smith (2010) suggests the need to focus on the multiplicity of ways children and young people act, contribute to, and realise their own sense of agency in everyday life contexts. This raises questions about how '*spaces*' for their participation should be constructed and this article also **draws on a spatial understanding of** participation. It is important to recognise that agency arises out of social and cultural contexts. **According to Mannion (2007) there is merit in refocusing research on children's voice and participation to focus on the 'spaces of child-adult relations' to explore how 'context plays a role in the production of the ever-changing relations between and cultures of childhood and adulthood' (2007, p406).**

Research has illustrated that children are nested in webs of family relationships, and that their rights and responsibilities are influenced strongly by who they are related to, and who they know. Experiencing responsive social relationships and interactions is essential to promote children's exercise of participation rights (Smith, 2002). Children are unlikely to be able to express a view unless they have the conditions which help them to formulate their views. For young people this means spaces where they can all engage, explore, learn, express themselves, interact with others, develop ideas, take the initiative, take on responsibility and develop confidence and abilities so that they can increasingly acquire the capacities to shape and influence their immediate environments, lives and futures (Percy Smith and Thomas, 2010).

Literature on Children's Participation in the Home

The complexity of children and young people's decision-making processes at home relates to the fact that there are no official mechanisms for their participation and that variables such as the family composition, number of children in the family, age of the particular child, socio-economic status etc., all impact on the child or young person's experience. Research has been undertaken internationally and in Ireland analysing the extent to which children and young people interact with formal participation and decision-making structures (Parkes, 2013, Martin et al., 2015). Some work attempts to understand children and young people's participation in schools (Devine, 2002; Lundy, 2007; De Castro, 2011; Gillece and Cosgrove, 2012; Fleming,

2013) as well as in community contexts (Percy Smith, 2010 and 2012). However, there is limited empirical data concerning the extent to which children participate or have a voice in the everyday activities of daily life, particularly in the home (Davey et al., 2010; Bjerke, 2011). Theis (2010) discusses the involvement of children in the home and school as a civil right which has an immediate impact on children and argues that the need for adults to listen to children is central to the expression of this civil right. Cherney (2010) examined parents and adolescents' views about children's rights and the development of autonomy during adolescence and found that children had a more nuanced understanding of rights than their parents thought they had and, on average, parents thought that their children would advocate for more rights than their children actually did. He finds that parents were generally given authority by young people over moral considerations, but less over conventional and personal conventions.

Generally, research identifies the home as the space most conducive to children and young people's participation. Bjerke's work with 109 Norwegian children aged 8 to 9 years, and young people aged 14 to 15 years, on their expression of agency in the home and school uses a difference-centred theoretical perspective to identify children's participation as expressions of agency embedded in intricate child-adult relations, in which children and adults are positioned differently (Bjerke, 2011). It draws upon findings from an international project, including data from Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, Norway, Palestine and South Africa, that sought to understand the meaning of citizenship, rights, responsibilities and participation for children and young people in the everyday contexts of their lives (Taylor and Smith, 2009). The Norwegian children and young people clearly state they have participation rights at homes in terms of having a voice and being able to 'decide a bit' regarding issues in their everyday lives. Children felt that the environment within the home was one which was conducive to them expressing their opinions and being involved in decision-making. Parents facilitated this by allowing children to participate in decision-making and offering them individual choices with a strong emphasis on negotiation (Bjerke, 2011). Consumption activities such as food, clothes and TV are major areas in which both children and young people discuss their participation. Concrete tasks are areas of negotiation for children while, for young people, issues such as how they spend free time are of concern. The study also found that, generally, young people appear to increase their degree of involvement in decision making as they grow older (Bjerke et al., 2011).

Davey et al (2010) examine the extent to which children living in England feel they have a voice and influence in matters affecting them at school, at home and in the area where they live. This report is based on the findings from focus group interviews conducted in England with 44 boys and 42 girls from a variety of backgrounds aged between three and 20 years. Day-to-day decisions within the family stand out as the only area where a significant majority of children feel they are heard and influence decisions. As children grew older they were more likely to have a greater say in decisions that were made at home, although the extent to which children's views influenced the outcome of a decision was said to be mediated by the degree to which parents concurred with their views. Findings emphasised the importance for young people of parents, and adults generally, explaining the rationale on which a decision had been made as a means of understanding the process rather than focusing on the outcomes (Davey et al., 2010, p.29). **These findings reflect the relational context within which children experience participation within the home and the centrality of their relationships with adults to their experiences.**

There has been limited research on the involvement of children in decision-making in the home in the Irish context. An Irish study which surveyed 1,353 parents on parenting styles and parental use of disciplinary strategies with children found that just over a third of parents felt it was very important to include children in decision-making in the context of family life and 54% felt it was somewhat important (Halpenny, et al, 2010). However, Halpenny et al., conclude that parents in the study 'did not view involving their children in decision-making as a key priority in their parenting' (ibid, p.51). The study found a link between democratic participation of children in the home and the use of physical punishment by parents to discipline their children and the authors also found that older parents (45 years and older) were more likely to engage in democratic participation with their children at home while younger parents (under 35) were more likely to engage in physical punishment of their children. This was also linked to the fact that the older parents tended to more likely to be parenting adolescents; again, this reflects international research studies (Davey et al., 2010; Bjerke, 2011; Cherney, 2011) which have found that as children get older they become more involved in decision-making in the home.

Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the extent to which children and young people, living in urban and rural Ireland, are able to participate and influence matters affecting them in their homes, schools and communities.

The study focused on children and young people aged 7 to 17 years living in contemporary urban and rural Ireland, and on parents, teachers and key adults who work with children in youth work or local community settings. A qualitative methodology enabled the researchers to tap into the unique knowledge and perspectives of children and young people as well as those of the adults to whom they relate on a daily basis.

The objective in the primary research with children and young people was to utilise child-centered participative research methods appropriate to their age and understanding, in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, and to provide fun, safe spaces for the children and young people who took part in the research, following best practice (Barker and Weller, 2003).

Sampling

The three locations chosen for the primary research were selected to represent urban and rural environments that demonstrate a range of affluence and disadvantage. The report *Measures of Affluence and Deprivation for the Republic of Ireland* (Haase and Pratschke, 2008), which draws on data from the 2006 Census of Population, was used to choose the locations. A multi-location approach facilitated capturing a diverse range of perspectives and the representation of urban and rural environments demonstrating a range of affluence and disadvantage. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select primary and second-level schools and youth and community projects in the three locations. Three primary schools and three second-level schools participated in the research, one primary and one second-level school in each of the three research sites. Purposive sampling in schools, youth and community projects was used to recruit children and young people who fell within the specified age range. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to achieve participation by teachers, parents and community stakeholders. In total, 74 children and young people and 34 adults participated in the research.

The inclusion criteria for participation in the research were minimal. Participants were expected to:

- Live in or use the services within the three locations

- Be children and young people aged 7-17
- Be parents who had experience of children and young people aged 7-17
- Be community stakeholders who worked directly or indirectly with children and young people aged 7-17.

Child-centred research methods

Fieldwork comprised one-to-one semi-structured interviews and focus groups to obtain detailed narrative data that captured the experiences and views of children, young people and adult stakeholders on the participation of children and young people in decision-making. Focus groups were conducted with children and young people and parents, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents, teachers and community stakeholders in each of the three locations. Focus groups were used in the fieldwork with children and young people on the basis that they would encourage open debate and shared recollection of participation in decision-making and thereby elicit rich data (Aston and Lambert, 2010). During the focus groups child-centred participative research methods were used including games, visual and verbal methods, drawings, and other interactive methods that helped capture their lived experiences of participation. For example, the focus groups with child participants (7-11 years) involved the use of three interactive floor mats in conjunction with a focus group discussion schedule. Each floor mat depicted one of the spaces of inquiry – the home, school and community. The children were asked to draw on each mat places of importance in their daily lives within that space, and to map where they spent time, where decision-making discussions happened, what kinds of issues were discussed, with whom the decisions were discussed, and how much of a say they had in decisions made or choices agreed. Photographs of the completed mats were taken and the main points of the discussion were noted on flipcharts. Creative age-appropriate interactive data collection methods were also used with the young people (aged 12-17 years). The discussions with them focused on the three realms of home, school and community, and were guided using a focus group schedule. Each focus group began with an icebreaker, followed by a verbal explanation of the project supported by an information sheet and accessible description of Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Seventy-four children and young people participated in 10 focus groups while a further 20 were involved in the pilot phase of the fieldwork and in Children's and Young People's Advisory Groups that were

established by the researchers. The focus groups were conducted in primary and second-level schools and youth and community projects. Individual interviews were conducted with eleven teachers and principals, nine community stakeholders and four parents while three focus groups involved a further ten parents.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University College Cork Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC). The project methodology was guided by the 2011 *National Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children* published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Some of the key ethical issues identified as relevant to this research related to maintaining anonymity for the participants, and to ensuring that strict child protection guidelines were adhered to at all stages of the research process. Ongoing, informed consent was a particular concern for the research team, and every effort was made to ensure that in particular, children and young people were not, or did not feel, coerced into taking part in the research, or into answering in ways they might feel would please adults (see Mannion 2007: 407). Prior to any interview, all participants were informed about the nature of the research and its key aims and objectives, and were assured of anonymity in the subsequent project write-up. All participants were asked to sign informed consent forms (plus parental consents for children and young people), which detailed the aims of the study and the uses to which the data would be put, in child/young person friendly language when used for children and young people. In addition, the consent forms were explained in detail to the children and young people verbally. The researchers are experienced in interviewing children and young people and were sensitive to the need for using a familiar environment and building rapport with child participants, as well as using suitable techniques, drawing on the work of the Davey et al (2010), Kellett (2009) and Greene (2005).

Data Analysis

Five discrete datasets were generated from the primary research; these were children, young people, parents, principals and teachers, and adults working in the community. A thematic analysis of each dataset was conducted under the three locations of home, school and community. The qualitative data were interrogated using questions based on Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Spaces for participation, types of participation, enabling factors, barriers encountered and recommendations to facilitate participation in each location were identified through systematic working through the transcripts. This paper will focus on the findings related to participation at home.

Findings

Relational dimensions of decision-making in the home

Family relationships were seen as key enablers of voice: “It all depends on the closeness of your family” (Rural Youth). Mothers in particular were described as good listeners by the children and young people. Considerably more interaction and negotiation was reported with mothers than fathers by both children and young people, across genders, and in both rural and urban sites.

Anytime is a good time to talk to my Mam really. I can never talk to my Dad about anything personal or anything, just about soccer, that’s basically it, and taking his money as well. Ha! Ha!” (Urban Youth)

“My mam listens to me” (Urban Child)

“My mum, because my dad is in work most of the time” (Urban Child)

Mothers interviewed presented themselves as the key listeners, counsellors, negotiators and final decision-makers across all aspects of daily living concerning their children while fathers were often described as playing a more peripheral but also supportive role.

“I threaten [them with] their father every now and then like” (Urban Parent)

“If I’m not sure what to do I say ‘ask your Dad’” (Urban Parent)

The parent participants in this study were unanimous on the importance they afforded listening to their children.

“I think it is hugely important. If you listen to them you can go through whatever they want to talk about, you know. Explain that to them that it is better than just laying an order down and not

listening to what they have to say about it.” (Rural Parent)

They viewed the act of listening as a parenting tool that increased their capacity to respond to the needs of their children. A reference was made to listening on different levels, indicating a range of listening from attending to explicit verbal and behavioural information to ‘tuning in’ to unstated undercurrents and the finer nuances of body

language.

“Listening can have different levels as well because you can hear what they say but often times there can be something [else], and maybe this is when they get towards their teens, my oldest now is 13 so things are changing” (Rural Parent)

The parent participants found it difficult to identify and describe examples of when they did not listen to their children and young people, “they always get a chance to say what they want.” (Urban Parent). Children and young people however also described their experiences of parents not listening to them and saw this as a barrier to their participation at home.

“I feel not listened to when people don’t answer me when I ask a grown-up a question” (Urban Child)
Adults don’t listen... So, if you’re talking about something that happens on TV, they’re like, ‘mmm’ [not listening],” (Urban Youth)

“My dad never listens - he always says, talk to me later, tell me about it later” (Urban Child)

The children and young people reported experiencing cursory interest and responses from parents on issues that were important to them. Subsequently they did not expect their decisions would be acted on. Some gave examples of participation being tokenistic or where children are simply informed of parent’s decisions. Young people expressed frustration at parents not explaining the rationale for decisions made.

Spaces Used for Participation in the Home

Voice and participation took place in family spaces mainly at times when the whole family was present, primarily during dinner and watching television in the evenings, but also at times when children and parents routinely spent time together including on the way to and from school and travelling in the car.

“At night. Dinner time. In the morning getting ready to go to school, I talk to my dad” (Urban Youth)

“In the kitchen, I’d mostly do it with my mum, because my dad works abroad” (Urban Child)

‘Anytime really. Dinnertime, when the family are all together. In the car, we talk about what’s happening.’
(Urban Youth)

‘When we’re coming home. When you are home, then like. When you’re doing your homework. At dinner,

when it's getting ready and stuff. Not in the morning 'cos we'd be all busy. The weekend ... but sometimes my mam would come home from work late and then we'd sit down. Family dinner.' [Youth, Urban]

Although they valued family time, children and young people nonetheless spoke of needing one-to-one time with a parent because family discussions were often dominated by younger or older siblings, "Later in the evening, when my little brothers have gone to bed" (Urban Child).

In relation to physical spaces there was discussion in some interview groups about how bedrooms offered children and young people the opportunity to control their own space: 'Allowed to put pictures on my [bedroom] wall' (Urban Child). However, the majority of the children identified shared family spaces such as the kitchen and sitting room as spaces where they felt they participated in decision-making and in particular they identified dinner-time as a facilitative space for family discussions.

Trust and fairness in decision-making

Trust was seen as an important indicator of parent's willingness to give young people more freedom in decision-making. While the young people felt trusted by their parents, they were unanimous that low levels of trust would present a major barrier to their voice and participation on issues of importance to them at home. The following excerpt from a group discussion with young people illustrates their frustration with parent's lack of trust in them: "I think it's either there or it's not. There's some people whose parents are like 'Oh you're never going out'" (Rural Youth).

The parent participants reported the greatest barrier to their children's participation remained the anxieties and stresses of parenting in a rapidly changing context. They explain that these pressures sometimes steer them towards a protective nurturing stance at the expense of promoting autonomy in their children. Some parents perceive a need to "overprotect", as they assume their children are unable to protect themselves. Unanimously, the parent participants viewed their children's safety as a priority and identified a number of common-place threats including cyber bullying, inappropriate TV/DVD viewing and friends.

There was a shared understanding among young people that they have to compromise and reach a consensus through discussion with their parents,

“Like if I was going to a party at my friends and Mam would ask me to be home at 12, we’d agree on

12.30. Compromise” (Urban Youth)

“If the kids get more rights they should have more responsibility. For example, if they’re allowed to go to the cinema where they weren’t before they should have to take on another chore” (Urban Youth)

Parent participants emphasized the need to exercise fairness that is consistent and undiscriminating, though at times this was difficult to achieve.

“He understands not everybody has the same view of it but he understands the same rules apply to everybody and that sense of fairness and this is how it works” (Rural Parent)

In the case of sensitive topics such as alcohol use some young people asserted that parents should be open and factual in their discussions, “stating the facts and saying that ‘If you do drink to excess this is what’s going to happen’, and saying ‘If you are going to drink don’t be stupid about it’” (Rural Youth). There was evidence of negotiation in the home around smoking and alcohol consumption activities with parents informing young people of the consequences. However, in some cases there was an element of secrecy attached to some of the young people’s smoking and drinking behavior. Young people acknowledged that there were situations when parents may know better, “If it’s things that are new to both of you, then they can’t really say that they know about it. But if it’s things like drinking and smoking and that they’ve already lived through it so they know what it’s about, so you can’t really say that you know more” (Rural Youth). Young people, then, generally acknowledged their parents’ authority and greater experience to inform decisions on alcohol and smoking. The young people accepted that their requests will sometimes be refused by parents. Overall, the level of transparency and direct discussion with parents about the alcohol and smoking activities varied. Of importance to the young people participants was to feel respected by their parents, ‘Yeah, they need to respect us’ (Urban Youth).

Age and maturity were seen by parents and children as important to increasing the participatory entitlement

of children and young people in family decision-making. Parents tended to have established routines for children around food, bath and bed-time but the structure and timing of these routines was subject to greater negotiation as the children became older. Decision-making with their older children included where to live after a parent's divorce, whether to attend mass or not, where to go on holiday, and choosing their own friends. The young people concurred with this and identified key points in their increased autonomy and participation in decision making as the movement from primary to secondary school and again at Transition year (when they are 16 or 17 years old).

“As you get older they expect you to get more mature and make your own decisions” (Urban Youth)

“Age is important in having a say. And the way you talk – the more mature you sound, the more they’ll listen” (Urban Youth)

This study identified that children begin to negotiate more autonomy, often in the face of parental reluctance or opposition and, similar to the views of the young people, parents identified this as happening after they transitioned from primary to secondary school.

Types of Decision-Making in the Home

Children and their parents identified key topics which were the focus of decision-making in the home context including food, bedtime, homework, pocket money and spending decisions. In relation to participation in food choices children reported that they were actively involved in choosing what was purchased in the supermarket, eaten at family meals and prepared for school lunches. Others wanted to have more input into their food choices. When children and young people were included in choosing food this was usually negotiated in a casual way with parents.

“My Mam decides ‘cos my Dad’s a terrible cook. She’d ask us what we want. I go shopping sometimes with her. We sit down, and we have a vote about what we want, and the majority decides. When everyone is at home, we have a vote” (Urban Child)

“If I don’t like what we have to eat, I just have what I want. I’ll just have cereal or something” (Urban Child)

Most children and young people felt that it was only fair that they are allowed to take part in decisions about what and when to eat. In many cases they reported that there was little discussion on this as parents generally knew what

they liked.

Children and young people discussed clothes and hair with parents, indicating that parents often have the final decision.

“When we buy clothes, me and my Mam choose them together. Mostly my mam says what I should wear... And sometimes when we go shopping, we have to use our own money and if we don't have enough money, we have to put the clothes back.” (Urban Child)

“We compromise.” (Urban Youth)

“I can get my hair cut whenever I want, but I would not be allowed to dye my hair.” (Rural Child)

Parents recognized that choosing clothes and hair styles was a way in which children and young people express their individuality, but also spoke of practical constraints on children's choices including time and weather conditions.

In this study, the parents generally decided on bedtimes for children (aged 7-12) with more discretion and flexibility enjoyed at the weekends. With the young people participants (aged 12-17 years) there appeared to be more freedom, “My mam often comes in [to the bedroom] at half past eleven and says ‘you should try to get to bed, you’ll be better off’” (Urban Youth). For the parents there was an overriding concern about children not getting enough sleep.

Most children were happy to have limits set on the time spent on homework and when it is done as, ‘Then you get it over and done with and you’re free for the rest of the day’ (Urban Youth). Generally, the young people reported flexibility on when homework was completed, ‘My parents usually give me enough time to make a decision on when I do it... so I make the choice as to when I do it I suppose’ (Rural Youth). The children experienced more prescription in their homework routines. The increased stress at home associated with studying for state examinations was commented on by some of the young people.

Most of the children and young people participants had to earn pocket money in exchange for doing chores around the house, “For a job” or “When I babysit”. Spending by the children was usually subject to varying

conditions, for example one child referred to restrictions from her parents that she should “only buy it if it’s something that you are going to use”. The young people in the study experienced considerable freedom on how they spent their pocket money. They referred to pocket money in terms of money for necessities such as phone credit from their parents, grandparents, or in some cases older siblings. Parental management of pocket money varied. Some parent participants gave money on demand; some paid amounts into bank or credit union accounts; one parent described it as the dad’s role; and others paid a set amount regularly once their children were in their teens, sometimes as a ‘wage’ for agreed chores performed. Parents were unanimous that phone credit was the most common financial demand followed by money for occasional trips to town.

“Anytime they look for money, it is for credit. That is all they want, credit or... if they are going to town”

(Urban Parent)

In relation to their leisure activities the children and young people identified television as important to their leisure. Most described how their use of TV in the home was negotiated and agreed with parents. Some of the parent participants were unequivocal about the need for an authoritarian style of parenting, described as high in demandingness and low in responsiveness (GUI, 2012), in relation to the duration of television viewing.

“I am afraid; I definitely lay the law down there. It just goes to show you really have to lead children. Like my two children would sit all day at the television if I let them. But some evenings, I just say No. If it is a nice evening, I say ‘No, go out and play’ and more often than not they don't even come back to look for it because they love being outside. So I definitely make the decision on that” (Rural Parent)

There was also dialogue concerning the issue of monitoring and censoring the television viewing of their children. Young people’s internet use was examined using an ‘Internet Tree’ activity followed by group discussion with participants aged 12 to 17 years. The data showed that internet and social media are central to their lives with most of their activity concentrated in communication and entertainment followed by education and information activities. Discussions with parent participants evidenced the worry, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy that their children’s Internet use engendered. Their concerns were heightened by their limitations in what they referred to as, ‘this other world’ (Urban Parent) and their children knowing ‘much more about

technology than we do' (Urban Parent).

Other leisure and extra-curricular choices of the children and young people involved in this study encompassed a wide range of activities mainly external to the family home. Joining and leaving extra-curricular activities were negotiated with parents.

"I want to quit Taekwondo but my mam has paid for it, so she won't let me" (Rural Youth)

"If I want to join a sport, we discuss all that might be involved" (Urban Child)

"My dad played [football] when he was younger, but he wasn't pushing me to play, I wanted to play."

(Urban Youth)

Parents were unequivocal about allowing their children choice of activities. Even when they disagreed or were disappointed by the children's decisions, there was general agreement that they would not enforce an activity against their child's wishes.

Friends were highly valued and negotiating time spent with friends featured in the group discussions with children and young people as did the role played by friends in listening.

"My friends listen to me, and I'll talk to them a lot about things that are going on." (Urban Child)

Some young people described parental restrictions on who they see, where they go and the time they need to return home,

Like if you're going out to your friend's house and if they [parents] go 'Oh'... Like they think you'll just be off doing stuff you shouldn't do" (Rural Youth)

"Sometimes my parents might say 'we don't like you hanging around with them'" (Urban Youth)

Parents strongly acknowledged the importance of peers to their children's lives. Drawing on their own childhood experiences they were fully aware of the potential positive and negative influences that peer pressure might have on their own children. The worries and difficulties of undesirable peer friendships were discussed.

Discussion

There has been limited research on the involvement of children and young people in decision-making within their homes that focuses on the Irish context. In seeking to understand the extent and nature of children and young people's participation in their homes this study found that parenting style underpinned and generally shaped the degree of parental listening, the type of decisions their children participated in, and how parents attempted to protect their children. Whilst the home was found to be a place of negotiation, parental listening and family discussion, the balance of influence over decision-making outcomes favoured parental viewpoints. Overall the parent-participants attempted to respond to and manage their children's individual agency, against a range of societal and self-evaluated parameters associated with responsible parenting.

The concept of fairness and compromise in the decisions made by adults which impact on children and young people was discussed. There seems to be a shared understanding among young people that they have to compromise and aim to reach a consensus through discussions with parents. This was also evident in research by Bjerke (2011) which finds that knowing that their parents recognise them as persons and being able to see the situation from their parents' point of view gives young people a reasonable explanation for why they are differently treated, even if it is experienced as unfair at the time. **Negotiation with parents centred on issues such as food, clothes, and use of leisure time, highlighting how the banal affective spaces/interactions including food practices constitute adult-child intergenerational relationships and help us to examine family relationships and children's agency (Mitchell and Elwood 2012; Ralph 2013).** Some key issues in relation to decision-making in the home emerged in the research; these will now be further discussed.

Parental trust and attitude to child autonomy

Trust and building of trust through communication and information sharing with parents and developing a track record of dependability was seen by the young people as a really important facilitator of their participation. A number of young people spoke about the importance of mobile phones for keeping in touch with parents and giving them more responsibility. Warming (2013) examining the impact of trust dynamics in shaping children's participation, citizenship and well-being argues that this is underexplored in research. This research found that trust was an issue of huge significance for young people in enabling them to negotiate

with parents and gain more autonomy. It has been found that children who have been taught that lying is sometimes acceptable may use this view on moral reasoning if it achieves beneficial outcomes such as avoiding relational conflict (Lavoie et al. 2015). Cherney's (2010) review of research would support the young people's views that as children grow older they begin to assert self-determination and control over multi-faceted issues as well as personal domains (Ruck et al, 1998). And that the development of autonomy is shaped to a large extent by adolescents' own efforts, with increasing age, to construct an expanded personal sphere of decision-making, often in the face of parental reluctance or opposition (Helwig, 2006).

The negotiated character of family relationships is well established in the literature which examines fluidity and change as integral features of family life (and Flowerdew, 2007). This is well demonstrated in our research where as children grow older, parents and children increasingly view personal issues (e.g., choice of food, clothing and friends) as being matters of personal or individual choice and not subject to parental authority, and gaining control over decision making is linked to children's developing sense of autonomy and self-determination rights (Smetana, 1995). Ruck et al. (1998) as well as Helwig (1995, 1997) proposed that the social context in which the right is embedded is an important variable to consider when investigating perceptions of children's rights. They suggest that the manner in which children construct their knowledge and reasoning about rights arises not only from maturational factors, but also from differential social experiences and interactions pertinent to the different domains or types of rights under consideration (Cherney, 2010).

Age and maturity were seen by parents, children and young people as important to increasing the participatory entitlement of children and young people in family decision-making and they identified key transitions in children's lives such as starting their second level education as milestones for increasing levels of trust in their children. This is supported by the data in Davey et al.'s study which suggested that as children grew older they were more likely to have a greater say in decisions that were made at home, although the extent to which children's views influenced the outcome of a decision was said to be mediated by the degree to which parents concurred with their views (Davey et al., 2010). Similarly, Cherney (2010) states that parents change the balance of autonomy and relatedness at different periods in their children's growth and one of the important developmental periods during which such shifts may occur is during early adolescence when

children start to negotiate for more autonomy from their parents. The young people in this research spoke about a definite trend in their growing independence and autonomy.

Participation Spaces

Spaces which appeared to facilitate voice and participation include around the table at meal times (primarily dinner), watching television in the evenings, but also include times when children and parents routinely spent time together in the day such as on the way to and from school and in the car.

Kernan (2010) argues that the '*new*' geography of children has much to offer an understanding of childhood and youth in contemporary urban societies by placing to the fore considerations of children's experience of space and place in the context of belonging and participation. There is much discussion about children's changing space-time behaviour. Over time, children's geographies and use of space has changed with less use of the public space of the street and conversely, private home space has become a child space. Karsten (2005) identifies indoor children and children of the backseat generation arguing that these two new types of childhood are characterized by a decrease in playing outdoors and an increase in adult supervision. This highlights the importance of children and young people's interactions in the home. A further finding in Kernan (2010) was that the routes and journeys between school settings and home, or between school settings and local parks and other public places, were significant sites for children's everyday play-life outdoors. We would contend that this also holds true for children and young people's opportunities for communication and voice. Young people however, while recognising the value of family time, spoke about needing one to one time with parents also and how conversation and discussion among the family can be dominated by older siblings.

The idea that bedrooms offer children and young people the opportunity to control their own space was evident in our research where decorating their bedroom was important for a number of the children (aged 7-12) in particular. The changing character of indoor space at home as a place for children and young people is demonstrated by Karsten (2005) who explores children and young people's references to their bedrooms as places which offer an escape from parental control and the adult gaze and James (2004) discusses the

importance of the bedroom as a leisure site for adolescent girls in Western Australia who rated it as the recreational space where they felt least self-conscious and most chose to be.

Listening to Children

Children and young people expressed frustration at adults not listening to them and saw this as an important barrier to their participation at home. The parent participants in this study were unanimous on the importance they afforded listening to their children. They viewed the act of listening as a powerful parenting tool that increased their capacity to respond to the needs of their children. Listening was their surveillance and early warning system enabling them to gather information on their children's activities and friends, probe into uncertainties or concerns, and provide timely information or guidance. Listening was also about relationship building, nurturing trust, instilling desirable values, fostering warmth, and reinforcing personal worth. Since interpersonal communication is crucial to making others aware of our needs it is reasonable to suggest that any relationship would suffer if it were compromised. Not being listened to can be related to not being heard and not being taken seriously, both disempowering experiences (Lundeby and Tossebro, 2008).

The parent participants found it difficult to identify and describe examples of when they did not listen to their children and young people. Some parent participants were firm and preemptive in their approach to managing their children's demands. Recollections of not being listened to evoked considerable empathy and served to galvanise the resolve of the parents to avoid such memories in their children. Reactions by the children were described as determined, undaunted and persevering. Frustration was also described manifesting behaviours that went beyond repetition and insistent culminating in more impudent and disrespect responses. Being listened to at home was very important for child participants in this research with evidence of Mothers in particular being perceived as good listeners by children and young people. There appeared to be significantly more interaction and negotiation with Mothers across both age groups (7-12 years and 12-17 years), across genders and in all sites visited for this research. This may not be surprising given the findings from the national Irish longitudinal study, *Growing Up in Ireland* (Williams, 2009) that for 97% of 13-year-olds, the primary caregiver in the home was their mother while for 2% it was their father. A range of views were expressed on the engagement of fathers by the parent participants who were all mothers. The fathers were

mostly described in nurturing, supportive terms by the parent participants.

Parenting Style

Responsive parenting has been identified as central to an *authoritative* parenting style (Maccoby and Martin, 1983) which is considered optimal to achieving the most positive developmental outcomes (Nixon, 2012). This style of parenting combines firm parental demands for appropriate behavior with warmth and responsiveness (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Based on information from children themselves, *Growing Up in Ireland* (Williams, 2009), showed that 77% of mothers and 68% of fathers used an *authoritative* parenting style. Responsive parenting that utilizes explanatory feedback is central to children and young people's experience of participation and decision-making (Davey, Burke and Shaw, 2010). Reflecting on memories of their own childhoods and of those of their older children, the parent participants made comparisons between the *authoritarian* parenting style of those times (MacCoby and Martin, 1983) and their own contemporary style. Traditionally, fathers are seen as the main disciplinarian in the family but recent studies, including this study, suggest that this has changed. Hallers-Haalboom et.al. (2016) found that mothers disciplined their children more often than fathers. In addition, it found that fathers showed more laxness in response to children's non-compliance than mothers.

An underpinning source of apprehension for the parent participants was not so much about allowing the inclusion of their children in decision-making but deciding where to draw the line in relation to over-ruling their children on matters that affected them. Questions of fulfilling strongly held ideals of parental responsibility, achieving 'good enough' parenting and upholding fair consistent parenting were raised in the parent participant discussions. Their narrative alluded to a considerable investment of emotional labour in their parenting including having to deal with recurrent feelings of guilt, the worry of uncertainty, and the pressure to be ever prepared and vigilant. There was reference to the energy levels that parenting within a participative negotiating family environment requires. It is suggested that there is a determining relationship between the promotion of a culture of children's rights as set out in Article 12 (United Nations, 1989) and a contemporary emphasis on parenting socially competent, independent, autonomous children. This is underpinned by a modern view of children that recognizes their capacity to understand, act and participate

(Prout and James, 1997). From this stand-point the authority of parents is embedded in a rights-based democratic frame, extending benefits for children, parents and society.

Decision-making on consumption

One of the striking findings in our study which is similar to that of Bjerke (2011) is that consumption of various forms appears consistently when children and young people talk about their voice and participation. Boys and girls in both age groups say they take part in decisions about buying and choosing clothes, food, toys, phone credit and other things for themselves. In the 7-12 year olds, concrete everyday tasks, such as the way they are dressed, bedtime, leisure activities, and the amount of time they spend playing computer or watching television are other examples they give of issues they discuss with parents. Unsurprisingly it appears that, to a larger extent, the 12–17 year olds live a more independent life from their parents, and they are more concerned about issues such as the ability to be with friends and do what they want on their own.

As detailed in the findings section parents managed the distribution and conditionality of pocket money in a number of ways and they were unanimous that phone credit was the most common financial demand followed by money for occasional trips to town. **Children and young people discussed the ways that pocket money allowed them to exercise agency over their consumption activities.** In relation to questions of food and eating practices, most children and young people think it fair that they are allowed to take part in decisions about what and when to eat. In many cases, they say that there is little discussion on this as parents generally know what they like and dislike. However, some regulation from parents appears common, such as the need to eat what is considered healthy and to have a family dinner on at least some occasions during the week.

Decision-making on daily activities

Parent participants discussed the negotiation of routine everyday tasks with their children such as clothing, leisure activities; time spent playing computer games or watching television, and bedtime. Research elsewhere reviewed by de Roiste and Dinneen (2005) has reported that, for adolescents, the favourite independent and unstructured activities are watching television, use of the internet, talking on the phone, listening to music and reading, while the favourite activities with peers are ‘hanging out’, shopping and going

to the cinema and the favourite community activity was sports. These are almost universal ‘entertaining’ pursuits across the adolescent population. In this research both children and young people spoke about watching television, using the internet and social media as being very important in their leisure time and many referred to negotiations around their engagement with these media in the home as being generally unproblematic.

Discourse evidenced the worry, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy that their children’s Internet use engendered for some parent participants. Their concerns were heightened both by the, often pronounced, parent/child dichotomy of technological understanding, where children were in the ascendancy, and the rapid pace of change in technologies. This situation served to accentuate the parental condition of limited control over their children’s Internet use. Furthermore, some parent participants were mindful that if their children were subject to cyber bullying they would remain unaware.

In relation to internet usage data from the young people in the study completed young people participants showed a strong concentration in the communication and entertainment orientated uses followed by learning orientated information activities. Communication uses mainly involved sending and receiving emails, use of instant messaging, visiting a chat room, and posting photos, music or videos to share with others. Generally, these uses involved low risk Internet activities. They played games on-line against one another and this pattern of use is supported by the published literature on internet use (McAfee, 2010). However, the research team was very aware that young people did not want to discuss the ‘Other’ category and there was either silence or nervous laughter when this was broached with them. In this regard, McAfee (2010) in the US found that about a third (32%) of young people surveyed say that they don’t tell their parents what they are doing online, and would change their behaviour if they knew their parents were watching (31%). By the time they reach the ages of 16 or 17, 56% of teens hide their online activities.

Extra-curricular activities such as sports featured quite a lot in discussions with the children and young people who spoke about how they get to choose their activities through negotiation with their parents, although parents emphasised the negotiations around this far more than the children. Leisure encompassed a wide

range of activities mainly external to the family home. Watching television was the exception that the parent participants mentioned. Some of the parent participants were unequivocal on the need for an authoritarian style of parenting in relation to the duration of television viewing. There was also dialogue concerning the issue of monitoring and censoring the television viewing of their children.

Conclusion

The home, particularly when compared to school and community (authors, 2017) was experienced by children and young people as the setting most facilitative of their voice and participation in their everyday lives. While, generally, they felt they had a voice and some level of influence, there was also much evidence of tokenistic practices as well as limited participation at home. Most children and young people accepted the authority of adults regarding decision making, although they were more likely to negotiate the adult/child power difference as they grew older. Age, issues of trust and tokenism were highlighted as significant barriers in young people's participation and decision making at home. Key enablers included spaces where discussion can happen at home, good family relationships, being listened to by parents, trust and growing levels of independence with age, seeing decisions as fair and having the rationale for decisions explained to them by parents. They recommended that parents provide definite times and spaces for discussion, the need for parents to actively listen to and to explain the rationale for decisions to children and young people all contributing to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to participation.

Age was identified as an important factor in facilitating voice and decision making for children and young people in the home. Involvement in decisions about consumption activities such as food, television, clothes and hair, holidays were most frequently mentioned by children and young people. Bedrooms emerged as important private spaces for both the children and the young people interviewed. Pocket money, in particular afforded children the agency to choose what to spend money on and was a source of much debate in the groups. Extra-curricular activities and how children and young people spent their spare time generally dominated a lot of the discussions with the ability to be with friends significant, particularly for the young people who were exercising more independence from their families.

Young people's experiences of negotiation around issues such as smoking, drinking alcohol and more sensitive issues appeared to be quite mixed with some young people saying that this was avoided while others spoke about negotiating ground rules with their parents.

While the children wanted to have a say in family decision-making, they do not necessarily expect (or want) to make the decisions themselves. They do want more say on issues that directly affect them, such as bedtime and playtime. Teenagers have greater autonomy and independence than younger children. However, both younger and older children feel it is legitimate for parents to have greater influence over some issues such as what time they are allowed out and who their friends are.

Significant challenges for parents included the rapidly changing socio-cultural context and pressures of managing expectations that were not modeled during their own childhood. There was anxiety about the risk presented by social media and a desire to protect their children from exposure to negative aspects of internet use. Furthermore, it was their own childhood experiences that influenced and motivated their own parenting style. Ultimately, the parents indicated that they generally had the final say. Our findings confirm previous research on children's experiences of participation and decision making within the family, presenting a generally positive picture where the home and the family are places for negotiations, where adults listen to their children's views to obtain agreement and shared decisions through discussions, rather than dictating what the child should do without giving reasons for it.

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